

Wycliffe began the doctrinal and ritual revolution, even he did not begin this wider movement. Lollardry was but one of the many channels along which flowed the tide of lay revolt. Chaucer, Langland, Gower, John of Gaunt, the rebels of 1381, the townsmen rioting against monasteries, the Parliament men who demanded the confiscation of Church property, those who would not do penance, those who refused to appear in the Church courts, those who would not pay tithe, were all striving in the same direction. Lollardry offered a new religious basis to all. Under Henry the Eighth all these forces rose together and swept away the mediaeval system. The King did it, the nobles took the spoils, but the nation reaped the advantage. The Northern counties, which had not shared in Lollardry or in any of the kindred movements, rose to protest in the Pilgrimage of Grace; but the South of England, which then meant the strength of England, stood by the King. In the reign of Eichard the Second many laymen had thought the existing power, property and privileges of the Church to be an evil, but a sacred evil. The Lollards asserted that ecclesiastical evils were not necessarily sacred. 'The triumph of that view was the downfall of the governing Church, and it preceded by thirty years the Elizabethan adjustment of doctrine and ritual.

In England we have slowly but surely won the right of the individual to form and express a private judgment on speculative questions. During the last three centuries the battle of liberty has been fought against the State or against public opinion. But before the changes effected by Henry the Eighth, the struggle was against a power more impervious to reason and less subject to change—the power of the Mediaeval Church in all the prestige of a thousand years' prescriptive right over man's mind. The martyrs who bore the first brunt of that terrific combat may be lightly esteemed to-day by priestly censure. But those who still believe that liberty of thought has proved not a curse but a blessing to England and to the peoples that have sprung from her, will regard with thankfulness and pride the work which the speculations of Wycliffe set *on* foot and the valour of his devoted successors accomplished.